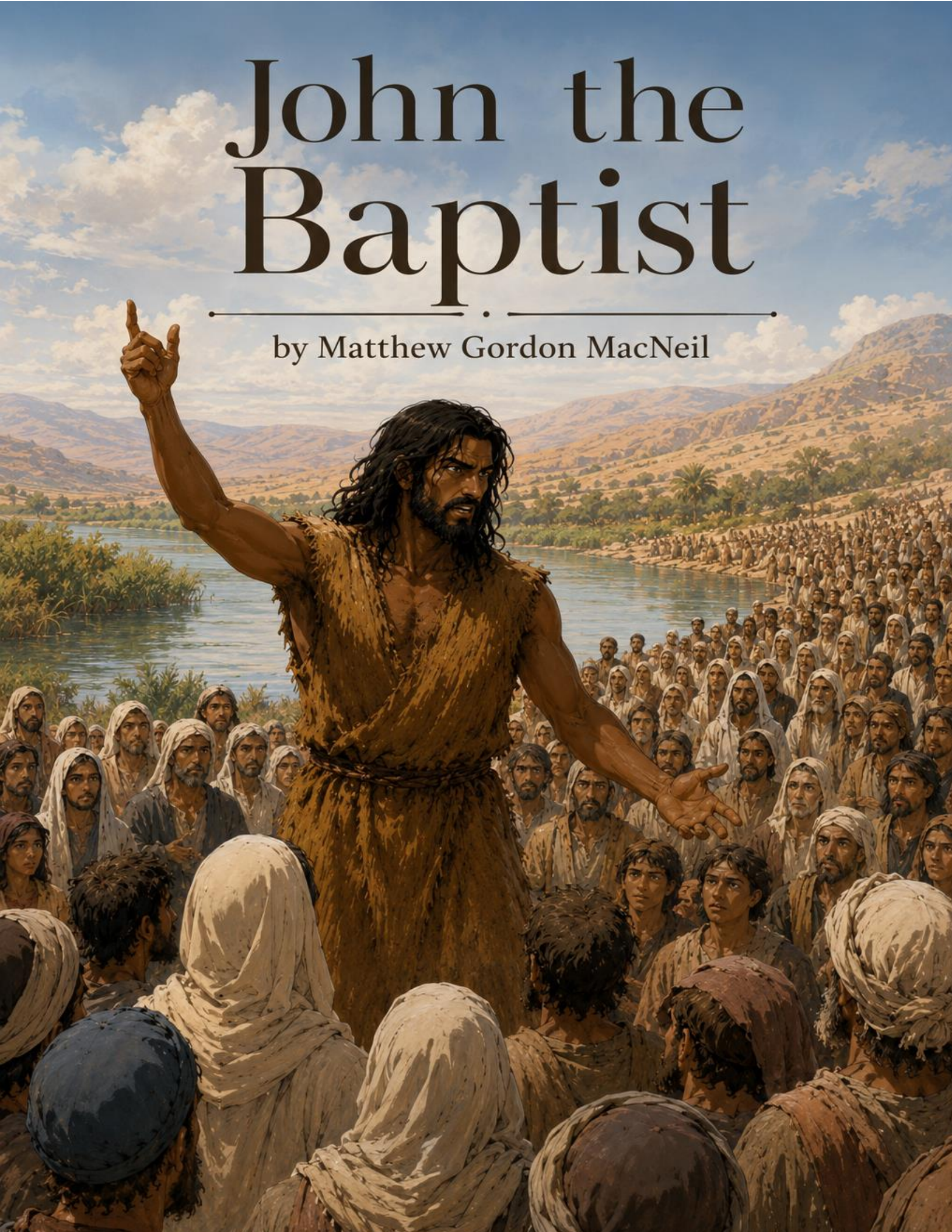
John the Baptist

by Matthew Gordon MacNeil



John The Baptist

By Matthew Gordon MacNeil

Before Jesus of Nazareth Israel had another Prophet, one who held those in power to account for

their corruption and mistreatment of the poor. Like Jesus John cared little for worldly possessions, living off honey and the donations of his followers.

At the Jordan River he baptized people into a new movement, one where Jew and Gentile were equal and made citizens of a new Israel.

Soon, people began whispering John was Elijah reborn, the man who would usher in the Messiah, but John himself denied this identification, focusing on helping the poor rather than sparking revolution.

Yet, it was true. He was the reincarnation of Elijah the Prophet.

His teachings, focusing on purifying the soul and restoring people's personal connection to God over the Torah, brought down the wrath of the Pharisees and the Temple priesthood in Jerusalem. A group came to the Jordan one spring day to challenge John's authority.

Instead of cornering him, the Pharisees found themselves mocked and ridiculed. John called them vipers, ridiculing their belief that simply being blood descendants of Abraham would give them any leeway with God.

Mercy and fellowship with their fellow man, John said, was how people pleased God. Not following laws corrupted by human hands.

Frightened by how forceful he spoke and scared his followers, numbering in the hundreds, may harm them, the Pharisees retreated back to the capital. They wrote to Herod Antipas, King of Galilee, asking him to deal with the heretic.

Antipas, who was not an observant Jew and cared little for Jewish law, took the letter seriously for another reason entirely.

John's growing movement, while not aimed at violent revolution, nonetheless could, he reasoned, be used for such a purpose at any moment. John descended from King David via his granddaughter Basemath who married the High Priest Ahimaaz, and though his royal blood was distant, it mattered

little to Herod as he himself descended from converts to Judaism and only had an even more distant connection to the Davidic lineage.

He ordered John's arrest.

The soldiers found the Prophet in Jerusalem, John spending

time with his wife Anhar and his four young children. The soldiers stormed the home and dragged him out, Anhar and the children following frantically behind.

Fearing what might happen if he were kept in the heart of Judea Herod Antipas sent the Baptist to the fortress of Machaerus in present day Jordan where he was stuffed away in a cell and left to rot.

Despite their leader being gone, John's movement continued to flourish in Judea and abroad, hundreds moved by his message of radical love and a new Kingdom of the spirit. Herod Antipas grew fearful they may try to bust John out of Machaerus. To prevent this he swiftly ordered his execution.

On an early morning not long after this order was delivered a Roman soldier entered John's cell and drew his sword.

The Baptist did not beg. He did not protest his innocence. Like Jesus would do after him John forgave his killer, facing death with a cool indifference.

Upon his passing Anhar and their children joined the growing Christian movement, becoming devoted followers of Jesus of Nazareth, who kept John's message alive.